

Winter 2010-11 PROCEEDINGS  
Fishing Vessel Safety

Title: Improving Safety without laws and regulations  
Subtitle: How fishermen can take ownership of safety

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In 1975 during the herring season in British Columbia, Canada 14 vessels capsized and 12 men were lost. The results of a national enquiry into these incidents recommended that “A national safety education program for fishermen be established by 1976. Since then regulatory agencies have scrambled to develop curriculums around fishing vessel safety, the federal government created regulatory requirements for stability on fishing vessels and fishing masters training. The provincial compensation board (WorkSafeBC) created regulations for safe practices on board. In 2002 a seiner capsized near Vancouver and became the 152<sup>nd</sup> capsizing in BC since 1975. This tragedy unfortunately reinforced the need to review why these regulations and educational programs didn’t work and what will work to reach the guy on the boat.

In this context the fishing industry in BC hired a fishing industry safety coordinator to look at ways the industry could begin to develop programs of their own to reduce injuries and fatalities. This article will share what we have learned about other ways and means to inspire fishermen to take ownership of improving safety without laws and regulations.

**Why regulations are not the only avenue available to improve fishing safety?**

The definition of insanity has been explained as continuing to do the same thing over and over and expecting a different outcome. In Canada and I would expect in most countries, if we have a fishing vessel incident we do an investigation and make recommendations on how to prevent this from occurring again. Routinely the recommendations are given to the people that the investigators feel are in a position to affect change. This tends to be the regulators or law makers, the ones with the authority or the biggest hammer.

For example: If a boat capsizes then that must mean there is a problem with stability. If we are a law maker or regulator then we look to our tool kit to see what we can use. This is usually another regulation usually based on the technical – a stability book or education – let’s make them take another course.

Sounds logical, but does it work – no. This has been proven time and again as vessels capsize with the stability book nicely stowed in the wheelhouse drawer and the certified captain at the wheel. This does not mean that having a proper stability assessment on a fishing vessel would not be an important tool for decision making but only if the information is presented in an understandable manner directed at the fishermen and not prepared as a compliance document. This is relevant to education requirements as well.

If you are teaching stability concepts to a fisherman and you want him to transfer that knowledge to his operation then it better be fishing relevant.

The other issue around effecting change by the use of regulations is the regulators are sometimes tasked with things that they do not have the area of expertise to undertake. Case and point – communication with fishermen. A fisherman living in a small fishing community who receives a safety bulletin in the mail from a federal agency telling him about how his fishing operation needs to be adjusted or what training courses he must take to continue his fishing career that is well into the 4<sup>th</sup> generation in his family will take little or no heed because they do not generally give the regulatory agency any credit for having any expertise in fishing.

Yes, fishermen consider themselves unique and rightly so, you have to be a little unique to take to sea. We recently we hosted a strategic planning session on fishing safety and hired a professional facilitator and the first question from the audience to the facilitator whose only job was to make sure we got through the agenda was “what do you know about fishing?”.

At the end of the day, the decisions that are made on board that really determine whether fishermen come home safely are far from the inspectors and naval architects. The people in the best position to affect change are the master and crew.

It is important that whatever regulatory system that is in place works to inspire ownership and not undermine it. If you have an inspection system that is prescriptive and does not allow a fisherman to use his knowledge of the vessel to have input into what procedures he should have on board or where safety equipment is stowed then you could potentially undermine his ability to take ownership of a safety program on board. As a result you could end up with a compliance only program which has guys doing what you ask them to do for the sake of getting cleared to go fishing but once they leave the dock, shelving safety. So how do we inspire fishermen to incorporate safety on board?

Side bar:

- It's all in the presentation
- Fishermen have to be involved in the development and delivery of education and training programs
- Fishermen have to be convinced that incorporating safety into their fishing operations will benefit them

As mentioned, the fishing industry in BC recognized they needed to take a more strategic role in improving safety. The Provincial Compensation Board (WorkSafeBC) acknowledged the importance of industry sectors developing their own safety programs and through a partnership program administered the beginnings of FISH SAFE and what has become the catalyst for fishermen taking ownership of safety in collaboration with or in spite of regulations.

How is the Fish Safe program different than what was done in the past? Put simply, it is based on asking fishermen what tools they need to come home safely, and providing them in a manner that respects and builds on a fisherman's experience. The Fish Safe program uses real fishermen in all aspects of program development and delivery.

The second key to the success is collaboration with regulatory agencies and other experts through our Fish Safe Advisory Committee. This committee brings together everyone involved in fishing safety from Federal and Provincial regulatory agencies to individual fishermen, educational institutions and marine safety suppliers. By providing a forum to discuss safety concerns and work on a solution together – regulators are better informed on the realities of fishing and fishermen are having input into when regulations are needed and how to make them relevant and effective. Marine Safety suppliers hear what needs to be done to make their products effective in a fishing environment and all kinds of relationships are built. This forum has also created the needed support for Fish Safe to access funding from both provincial and federal agencies. Everyone involved realized that it is only through this collaborative effort that we can truly bring fishermen home safely. It recognizes that fishermen need to be involved in all aspects of developing safety programs and tools including regulations.

### **It's working (photos)**

Over the last three years Fish Safe has provided a 4 day Stability Education program to over 800 fishermen in 26 different communities in BC. The Applied Research Evaluation Services of the University of BC evaluated the program and noted:

"Participants expected to get, and received, knowledge about vessel stability and safety. They ranked the course, instructors, and instruction very highly, with particular emphasis on the practical application of course content and the relaxed and interactive course delivery. Not only did 96.8% gain knowledge from the course, 60.1% made substantive changes on vessels to increase stability and safety. As evidence of how worthwhile they thought the course was, 94.4% recommended the course to others, believing it to have the possibility of saving lives through increased knowledge of vessel stability".

Statistically we are currently in a downtrend when it comes to fishing injuries and fatalities. In 2009 we had no fishing fatalities and no capsizings. We don't plan to hang our hat on this statistic since we still have at least the same amount of fishermen to reach and have now started on cycling the first 800 through a 1 day Stability refresher course focusing on human factors.

The success of the Stability program allowed us to develop a program to assist vessel owners develop on board vessel specific safety programs. The Safest Catch Program has fishermen trained as safety advisors to provide a 1-2 day on board workshop that provides tools and direction to the master and crew on how to develop their safety procedures, emergency drills and safety equipment orientation. Within the first 6 months of the program we have engaged over 120 vessels with amazing results. Fishermen are empowered with great tools and information delivered to them by one of their peers. Immersion suits are being dusted off and tested, life rings that have never been taken off their holder are being used in a life ring toss and the mystery is taken out of testing an EPIRB. Most importantly Fish Safe advisors strive to impart the information needed for fishermen to incorporate safety into their regular operations and not just

what they do when an inspector is around. The benefits of regular drills and procedures come to light quite quickly and many aha moments make believers of both fishermen receiving the information and us fishermen delivering it. The bottom line is, by inspiring fishermen to take ownership you can improve safety without laws and regulations.

To sum up. In March 2009 the Transportation Safety Board of Canada acknowledged the need for something more than regulations in their Marine Fact Sheet on Loss of Life on Fishing Vessels. They stated “New regulations alone are not enough, nor are training programs that are not supported by daily reinforcement. All these elements must work in unison to create a change in the industry’s safety culture, and to improve safety for all those who earn their living from the sea.”

About the author:

Gina Johansen is a third generation fisherman out of Prince Rupert, BC. She has owned and fished several seine vessels in both the herring and salmon fisheries. In addition to fishing she began a project management business in 1992 providing marketing and quality programs for the BC seafood industry. With her fishing and marketing experience she took on the role of BC’s Fishing Industry Safety Coordinator in 2004. Her goals for the Fish Safe program are to have fishermen take ownership of safety on board. This is being accomplished by ensuring that all programs and tools are designed by and for the benefit of fishermen to ultimately reduce injuries and fatalities in the fishing industry.

Endnotes:

1. Transportation Safety Board Marine Fact Sheet, March 2010
2. Applied Research Evaluation Services of the University of BC, Executive Summary, Fish Safe Stability Education Program, May 2009
3. WorkSafeBC , 2009 Statistics

Captions:

IM2359: Trawler captain and crew receive Safest Catch Decal for developing their on board vessel specific safety program.

CIMG352: Captain Tim Joys aboard the Sena II, sablefish vessel takes his crew through an abandon ship drill

Fish Safe Ad and Come Home Safely Poster – examples of using fishermen in promoting safety in advertising

I00-267: Authors photo

I912 and I918 – fishermen participating in Stability Education Program

Oban Ventures Crew: crew on board Ocean King test out new immersion suits

Photos provided by Fish Safe

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